

Free webinar for Aotearoa's community, NGO & Iwi social service sector kaimahi

# Strengthening Wellbeing in Times of Uncertainty

Monday 27 September | Summary of webinar with Zeenah Adam, registered clinical psychologist

A special event for  
**Mental Health  
Awareness Week 2021**

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For Mental Health Awareness Week 2021 and in light of the impacts of the pandemic in Aotearoa, Social Service Providers Aotearoa and ComVoices partnered with Umbrella Wellbeing on a special webinar on 27 September 2021. It was an inclusive, safe space for everyone working across the community, NGO & Iwi social sector to learn from registered clinical psychologist Zeenah Adam of Umbrella Wellbeing (<https://umbrella.org.nz/>). Zeenah has worked in the NGO & community space in Aotearoa, so understands the particular challenges involved.

SSPA has put together this summary overview of the content of the webinar with Zeenah, to provide an ongoing resource for kaimahi across the NGO, Iwi social services and community sector in Aotearoa.

## Resilience Continuum

- There are a number of different places on the resilience continuum, and we move through the continuum and up and down it at different times.
- The continuum ranges through Thriving // Adapting // Surviving // Overwhelm // Burnout
- **Self-reflection pātai** - Can you notice where you are on the Resilience Continuum right now?

## Triggers of stress

- There can be many strong triggers for stress, in particular being in situations which are:
  - New and novel
  - Unpredictable
  - Ambiguous
- We are also right now living in a time of the three C's which can cause stress: Covid, Climate, Conflict.
- Uncertainty can impact us in many ways, manifesting as stress, tiredness, conflict, difficulty planning, pain...

## Stress and your brain

- Our brains have a number of different regions, and different parts of the brain control different parts of our response to things like stress and anxiety. You can read a good summary of this [here](#).
- When we are stressed or in a state of anxiety, we are often in 'fight or flight' mode.
- Our brains don't like uncertainty – it can activate a stress response and lead to things like worrying or catastrophic thinking, as a way to try and resolve how we are thinking.

## Awareness and noticing how we are is key

- We need to tune into ourselves, to spot the signs of stress.
- Te Whare Tapa Whā provides a useful framework for us to be able to spot signs of stress.
- It is about holistic wellbeing – all sides of our whare need to be kept strong and fortified.
- Read more about this on the Umbrella handout at the end of this document.
- **Self-reflection pātai** – *what does it feel like when your walls are wobbly?*

## Signs of concern

There can be different signs of concern for when resilience and one or more of the walls of your whare are starting to be wobbly. These can be different for everyone. Some examples are below:

- Te Taha Whānau: problems managing boundaries; sense of being the only person who can get the job done; feeling distanced; struggling to concentrate; mistrust...
- Te Taha Hinengaro: hard to manage emotions; hard to make decisions; re-experiencing traumatic memories...
- Te Taha Wairua: loss of meaning; feeling more cynical; sense of dread when it comes to work; changes in worldview (e.g. feeling unsafe); detachment...
- Te Taha Tinana: feeling really tired; trouble sleeping; feeling agitated or on edge; feeling nervous; relying on things like alcohol or drugs...
- **Self-reflection pātai** – *What are your early warning signs when you get stressed? How are your four walls feeling? Which ones are wobbly at the moment?*

## Promoting mental health and wellbeing – some skills and strategies

- Think about how you would respond to a friend – apply that same compassion to yourself.
- Remember to stop – we need to stop to calm our stress brain. Focus on what is in your circle of control – the things you can control and influence, rather than the things that you can't. Practice noticing – to tap in your awareness, and to bring your awareness back to the present moment. **Notice something you can see, feel, hear.**
- Boost positive emotion – some ways to do this are through gratitude, using your strengths, laughing, smiling, saying 'Kia ora!', through a daily joy activity, having fun as a team, doing random acts of kindness, being in nature...
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- Things that can support Taha Wairua: Setting intentions, reconnecting with important things, framing things as an opportunity, identifying values and sticking to them
- Things that can support Taha Tinana: stay active, eat healthy, keep a good sleep routine, get some daylight, gently notice and include ways that work for you to nurture your body, diaphragmatic breathing – slowing down your breath and breathing in and out of your belly.
- Focus on your social connections and support – notice your relationships. Who is around you? How are you relating to others? Are you in a strong or depleting state in terms of your resilience? Ask yourself if you can bring in other supports to help you rebalance.

### It's important to have an Action Plan

- First of all, understand why we have responses like stress and anxiety to uncertainty. It's normal to find it hard.
  - Second, recognise how to spot the signs of stress in yourself and others. Take a holistic view – the Te Whare Tapa Whā framework provides a helpful framework. Check on all sides of your whare, and see if there are any sides that are wobbly and need fortifying.
  - Third, practice strategies to boost your mental health and wellbeing – stop, pause, take control, connect with others – mā te kōrero, ka ora. The [Five Ways to Wellbeing](#) are a great place to start.
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### Some other helpful places to find mental health and holistic hauora resources

- <https://comvoices.org.nz/hauora-wellbeing/>
- <https://umbrella.org.nz/thinking/>
- <https://umbrella.org.nz/downloadable-resources/>
- <https://mailchi.mp/umbrella/resources-for-uncertain-times-umbrella-wellbeing-special-edition-newsletter?e=d3ef9cce12>
- <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/covid-19-mental-health-and-wellbeing-resources>
- <https://mentalhealth.org.nz/>
- <https://www.mhaw.nz/>

# Strengthening resilience during uncertain times overview

## THE IMPACT OF UNCERTAINTY

Situations that are **ambiguous, novel** or **unpredictable** are likely to activate a stress response in many of us. Under these circumstances we might struggle to make decisions, worry about the future, be more irritable or short in our responses, find our optimism getting knocked and experience physical and mental exhaustion.

The **good news** is that knowing this information and developing the right strategies will help us navigate uncertain times more adaptively.

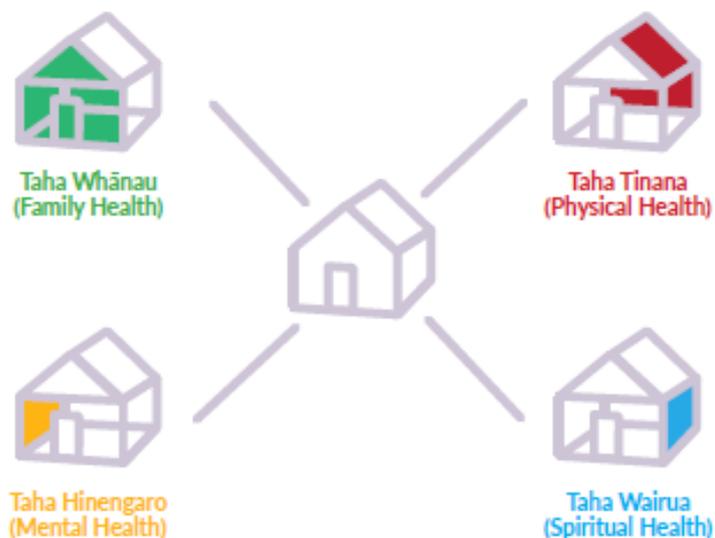
## SPOTTING STRESS IN OURSELVES

**Te Whare Tapa Whā** provides a useful framework for us to be able to spot signs of stress.

This model uses the metaphor of a whare/house to suggest that our wellbeing is supported by four key "walls".

We need these four walls to be strong in order to maintain our wellbeing. If one of these walls is wobbly, we can lose balance and become unwell.

Which of your walls are strong and which ones feel wobbly?



## PRACTICAL STRATEGIES

### Taha hinengaro = mental health

How do we promote mental health and wellbeing?

- Stop, pause and take breaks within your day.
- Notice when your mind wanders and gently bring it back to the present.
- Focus on the things that are within your personal control.
- Deliberately boost your experience of positive emotions.

### Taha wairua = spiritual health

How do we keep our spirit alive and well?

- Know what matters, what gives your life meaning and purpose. Keep your daily actions in check with these values.

### Taha tinana = physical health

How do we maintain our physical health?

- Focus on the basics – eating, sleeping, getting outside each day.
- Use diaphragmatic breathing.

### Taha whānau = family/social health

How do we strengthen our relationships?

- Take the time to invest in your relationships – introduce novelty and prioritise team fun activities.

Thanks for joining us. Want to know more or find out how we might be able to support you further?  
Check out our website <https://umbrella.org.nz/> – ka kite anō.